

## Federal Statistics: USDA Food and Nutrition Programs

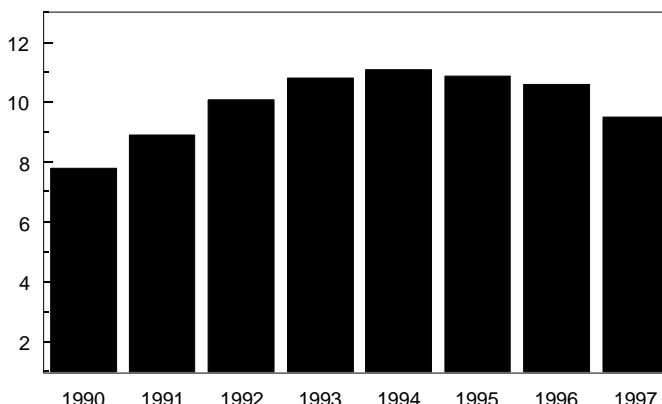
### USDA Food and Nutrition Programs Provide Nutrition Safety Net

The U.S. Department of Agriculture administers the Nation's major domestic food assistance programs. These programs provide a nutrition safety net to people in need. The goals of these food assistance programs are to provide needy people with access to a more nutritious diet, to improve the eating habits of children, and to help farmers by providing an outlet to distribute foods purchased under commodity price-support and surplus-removal programs. Three of the major food assistance programs are the Food Stamp Program, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs.

#### Participation in Food Stamp Program Declines in Recent Years:

The Food Stamp Program is the largest U.S. food assistance program, with outlays of \$19.6 billion in 1997. Most participants receive monthly allotments of coupons that are redeemable for food at authorized retail food stores. A growing number of participants receive an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, which operates like a bank card. From 1990 to 1994, the number of households receiving food stamps increased. Thereafter the number declined.

Number of households receiving food stamps (in millions), 1990-97

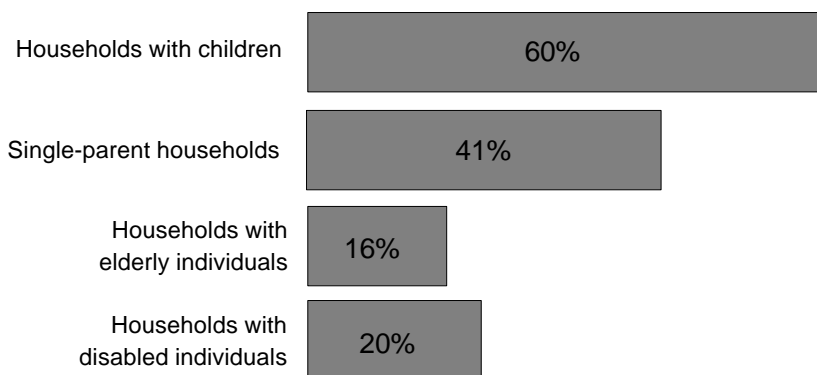


Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, 1998, unpublished tables.

#### Most Food Stamp Households Have Children:

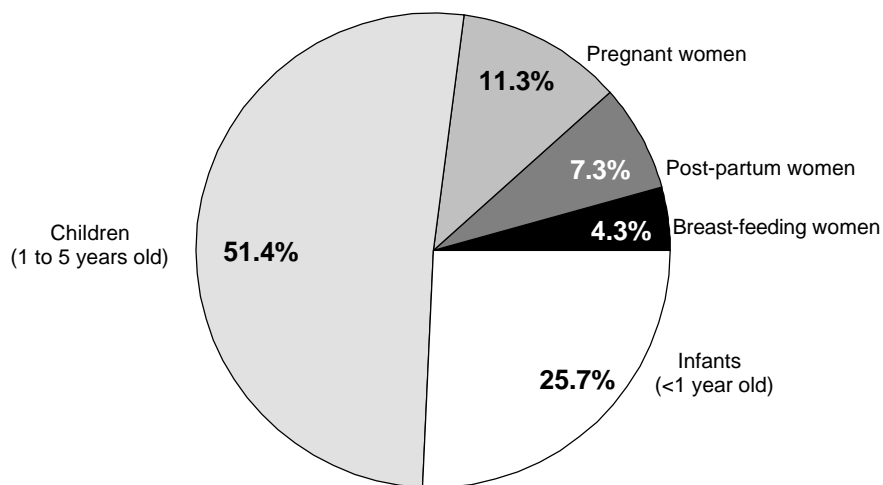
The Food Stamp Program is designed to address the basic nutritional needs of all eligible low-income households or individuals. Eligibility and benefits are based on household size, household assets, and income (gross and net). A large percentage of households receiving food stamps are composed of single parents and their children. Sizable percentages of food stamp households also contain elderly individuals (adults age 60 and over) as well as disabled individuals (adults less than age 65 who receive Supplemental Security Income and those age 18 to 61 who receive Social Security, veterans benefits, or other governmental benefits as a result of disability).

#### Composition and selected characteristics of households receiving food stamps, 1996



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Analysis and Evaluation, 1998, *Characteristics of Food Stamp Households, Fiscal Year 1996*.

## People enrolled in the WIC Program, 1996

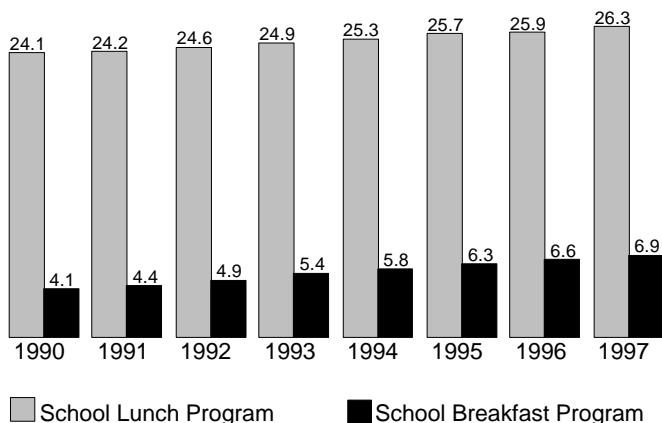


Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Analysis and Evaluation, 1998, *Study of WIC Participant and Program Characteristics 1996, Final Report*.

## Young Children Are Primary Recipients of WIC Benefits:

The WIC Program provides supplemental foods, nutrition education, and access to health care services to needy women, infants, and children. Participants receive vouchers that can be redeemed at retail food stores for specific foods (milk, juice, cereal, for example) that are rich sources of the nutrients frequently lacking in the diet of low-income mothers and children. In 1996, a little more than half of WIC participants were children (1 to 5 years old). Infants accounted for about one-quarter of participants; pregnant, post-partum, or breast-feeding women accounted for the remainder. Unlike the Food Stamp Program, the WIC Program must operate within annual funding levels established by Congress. Not all eligible participants are guaranteed benefits.

## Number of children participating in National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs (in millions), 1990-97



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, 1998, unpublished tables.

## Participation in School Breakfast Program Is Increasing:

Most school children eat a lunch provided through the National School Lunch Program. More than half of these children receive the meal free or at a reduced price. A growing number of children are participating in the National School Breakfast Program. In 1997, about 6.9 million children participated in the School Breakfast Program, up from 4.1 million children in 1990. Low-income children may qualify to receive school breakfast free or at a reduced price. Both programs provide cash reimbursements and commodity foods for meals served in nonprofit food services in elementary and secondary schools and in residential child care institutions.